

# Transcript of the interview with Marvin Hamlisch and CINE President Donald Thoms

November 2009

*Hello, everybody, I'm Donald Thoms. I'm the President of CINE, and I am honored to be sitting here with Marvin Hamlisch. He's a multi-award winning composer: Emmy, Oscar, Tony - you name it, he's won it or he's written it. Marvin, thank you so much for being with us.*

My pleasure.

*You know, we have a bunch of filmmakers who come to us and to our website and it's fascinating to talk a little bit about ... music and film, because a lot of times, filmmakers don't know what to do with music, or they can't afford to do music, or music is something they just can't think about. So we're going to spend a little bit of time talking about that, but let's talk about you for just a bit. What was the very first movie you saw? Can you remember?*

Oh my lord. I don't know what my first movie is. It must have been a cartoon, I guess. I know what one of the two movies that were the two most, I'd say, important in my life that I still always remember because of what they meant to me. One was *On The Waterfront*, which I had to beg my mother [to see]. At that time, you know, those were tough - it had nothing to do with the rules of G, PG, no, none of those. It was my mother's rules. And those rules were much tougher than the other rules. I was very young, I mean, I can't remember when it came out, but believe me I was very, very young. And I wanted to see this picture really bad, and my mother said, "No, no, no." Finally, I convinced her that I had to see this picture. That was one film. That use of music, I loved.

If you're going to talk about music, Music 101 is *High Noon*. And the reason *High Noon* means so much to me is because when you take a song - a little, simple western song, you know, (singing) "Do not forsake me..." - well the interesting part of that song is that the middle part is (hums rhythm). And that's how it is when you're watching the film - that piece of music. That part becomes the most important part for the whole, big, huge sequence at the end. And it becomes (hums rhythm again), all that stuff. You start to realize what music has going for it, and why it's important.

The way I explain it is music should do one thing: it should support and add to something. So if something's funny, maybe it can be funnier. If it's a love scene, maybe it can be more passionate. If it's a mystery, maybe it can be more mysterious. And the key is, that if you were a painter and you came into a room that had white, all white walls, if you painted some more white on the white, all you would have is a white wall, right? Exactly what you started with - just extra paint. The thing is to find that extra color, that extra something, that's going to take that white wall and do something to it that's even going to make it more. And what that is, that decision, is sometimes more about the color, in terms of the musical color. The quickness, particularly the speed, has a lot to do with films - how you pace a film, how you decide what's going to be fast and what's going to be slow, before you even get to things like melody and harmony and all that kind of stuff. It's the difference between having a great meal and then you

decide that I really just want a little extra salt there. That little extra salt is called music. And that's what it does.

*When did you know that you wanted to write for entertainment? Because you've done Broadway, movies, and television, but when did you know you wanted to write for the entertainment world?*

Well, I knew very early, because I went to the Juilliard School of Music at a very young age, and I realized very quickly that I was never going to be Horowitz. I mean, you're sitting around other kids that were 6, 7, 8 years old and they're playing like crazy and you're looking there going, "Well, they told me I was good at my home, but this is ridiculous."

But I loved music, and I didn't necessarily love all of Beethoven and Bach, but I fell in love particularly with Broadway because I was a New Yorker. And I remember, when you said, "What was my first movie," well I can remember my first shows, which were particularly *Pajama Game* and *Damn Yankees*. And what I loved about Broadway was (and I've always felt this; I mean, I'm now 65 years old - this is something I felt at the age of 8, and I still feel it) Broadway is really the manipulation of an audience. That's what it's about. Meaning: An audience comes in; pretty soon, they're going to absolutely believe that what they're seeing on the stage.

*You want them to.*

Right, and they're going to buy that in two seconds. Like, the fact that they buy in movies that there's music behind the stuff. No one ever says, "What was that?" They buy it, they go into a whole other world. But on Broadway, you're manipulating people because you also want them to applaud. You want that extra little something. And I used to think, "Wow, you write something and then people applaud. This is great." And so my first love, in terms of when I thought about show business, was really Broadway.

What happened to me was, I got jobs when I was 19, 20, 21 years old. I got jobs in the theatre [as a] rehearsal pianist, being a dance music arranger, but no one was saying, "Here kid, write a show." So the way I got into movies was simply because I was in the right place at the right time. I got a phone call at night from a friend of mine who said there was a party going on, and they realized they needed a pianist at the party because the man had just bought a piano and he forgot to bring a pianist. They always used to use records and tapes. And for the people who are watching this who are wondering what a record is, it's a CD with a goiter condition. So what happened was, I said, "Okay, I'm going to do it." It turns out the party was for Sam Spiegel - a great producer of *On The Waterfront*, of *Lawrence Of Arabia* - and I said, "I'll be over in ten minutes." And I played this party and out of playing that party, he told me that he gave Leonard Bernstein his first and only time he ever did a movie, [which] was *On The Waterfront*. And he was looking for a composer for another film he was doing, and this was called *The Swimmer*. And that's how I backed into movies.

*So The Swimmer was your first film.*

First film, yes.

*So let's talk about films. You were a young kid, and you write the musical score for a major movie. When do you get involved in the movie? At what point?*

Right. So the truth of the matter is that you get involved after the film has been shot; the film is put together, the film is done or as much done as they think it's done, what they might call "first cut," which means they've gone through it. They might still hone it together but it's done. Now the reason I say that, that's when I get the film is because there are some producers - and I think this is a mistake, by the way - there are some directors and producers who think that, some way or another, if a composer somehow gets to the set and stays there for a week and watches the film being made, it will help him compose. I don't believe in that at all.

Because, the truth of the matter is, when it's all said and done, the amount of music that you need to write for something is what it's about. I always make the joke that if Chopin were in the business of movies, he walks into the producer and says "Listen - I got this great minute waltz. I'm telling you, you're going to love it." And the producer says, "But I only need 57 seconds, so Freddy, do another one." Writing for movies is all about writing and making something sound inevitably to end when it's supposed to end. Like, for instance, doing a scene that's 48 seconds, you have to make the music sound that at 48 seconds, it would come to a natural conclusion.

So for me, I only want to see the film when I see it in its entirety and know how much music I really have to write. Because this idea that well, you go off and you write these themes somewhere and then you wait for the movie to be finished... to me, watching and seeing the film changes everything. It's not like going to the set, it really isn't. When you see it on the screen, that's what you got. You know it's different than going to dailies and stuff because you're going to see the same thing over and over and over again, and you're not experiencing the movie. For me, I go in to see a movie the first time with no preconceived anything. I don't want to know anything.

*So at this point you've not seen a script, you've not seen anything.*

I don't want to. I mean, I can, I can ask for a script but ... for me, until you see somebody say those lines, until it has humanoids up there... I like to just sit and watch the movie, as if I had popcorn and was just watching a movie. Then, after you watch the movie, here is the good and the bad: the good is that next to you, for the spotting session - the time when you're going to actually decide what music are we going to use, what are we going to write - you're going to have a director who's probably been working on this movie for a year and a half or two years. He knows every last little [detail]. He knows the wattage of the light bulb in scene 92. I, on the other hand, am John Q. Public. I have come with new eyes and new ears. Now what's good about that is I can really start to write based on how I feel about that movie. What you have to be really careful with in this world is that if you didn't love the movie...

*I was just gonna ask you that!*

... you have to be careful not to say that. Because no one's actually asking you your opinion of the movie; what they're really asking you for is, what can you write for this movie? But if they really ask your opinion for the movie, oh great filmmakers, most composers are probably going to say "This is the greatest movie I've ever seen in my life!" Because they want to keep the job.

So what you have to do is, you're on a kind of teeter-totter here between trying to write for this movie and also hopefully, if you felt that certain sections of the movie were not exactly great, you're going to try to make up for that in what you write for it. For instance, if you're watching a comedy and all of a sudden the scene seems really slow, you might pick it up with some very quick music, number one. So there are a lot of little tricks of the trade for you.

And the other thing I think is, which you know happens a lot in movies, when you think about or even when you don't think about music, usually filmmakers put what we call a temporary track to the film. Why? Well if you're doing, for instance, a montage for a minute and a half, watching a montage and seeing people running in slow motion on Malibu, doesn't really make it without music, you know what I mean? It just doesn't. So what happens is the director puts in music, or somebody puts in music. The thing is, that's really helpful to the director because he can watch the film and get a sense of it. One of the problems with it is it influences the new composer. When I worked on *The Way We Were*, believe it or not, the temporary track ... had every great composer's [music]. They had Henry Mancini in there, Michel Legrand was in there. I mean, you name it. They had Georges Delarue. They had everybody and his mother in terms of the cues in the film, and it took me a long time to try to put that out of my head. And there's one cue that I could never put out of my head and I'm sure it's very much like what was in there. So basically, yeah, you come with these new eyes and ears, but you get very quickly sucked into what the director wants. But on the other hand, if a director really knows what they want, it can be very helpful because they've lived this film. And they have a theory in their head.

I just did a film - a very interesting film, *The Informant!* - and Steven Soderbergh - who's a brilliant director - his first words to me on this film were, "I want people to know this is a comedy. You have to do whatever you can to let people know: This. Is. Funny." Now, if the director is telling you that, he's really giving you a big, wide range to be funny, you know what I mean? So yeah, those things can be very helpful.

*You just brought up so much. I am such a huge Barbra Streisand fan. You did The Way We Were. Robert Redford and Barbra Streisand are in this film, and you wrote all the music for that movie, and then you wrote a song for her. What's that like, when you know you've got a massive star who is also an extraordinary singer? What pressure does that put on you, as a composer?*

Well, that film is interesting because when you [asked] me [if I] ever read the script, that time I had to read the script first, because there had been a notion, the possibility existed ([though] it never happened) that she might have sung the song on camera. They were thinking about that, which meant then that you need the song early. So again, the good thing is that if you're writing for somebody, what's great about it is that you know the person that's going to sing the song. That's great. I mean, if you can actually tell me that I'm writing for someone, that's a wonderful thing because it's like, "Wow!" Because we have [that person] in our mind. Obviously, if you're writing for Barbra Streisand - one of the great singers of all time - you want to be really, absolutely sure that when you bring this song that you're bringing what you consider to be your "A" game, right?

So on one hand you do not want to be rushed. I mean, a lot of times in the movie business you get four weeks to write the score, and it's like, "Give it to me now, give it to me yesterday." Bill

Conti, I believe, did *Rocky* in two weeks. I mean, come on! That's unbelievable. So if you're not under too much pressure, if you [can], say to me, "Look, you know, we're going to do this film in six months, but start thinking about the song." So I sat down and I started thinking about the song, [I] started writing the melody. And then I immediately called Alan and Marilyn Bergman. And I ... talk[ed] to them about Barbra and everything like that, and then we wrote the song. And then we also laugh about the fact that, well, here we are, these three non-singers going to Barbra Streisand to show her the song, you know what I mean? And, of course, she really liked the song, but she wanted changes in the song, and we made the changes and everything was fine.

But yeah, the pressure's on! Because I gotta tell you something: When you have a star of that magnitude, the truth of the matter is, she has to be happy with the song. You're not going to shove it down somebody, saying, "You gotta do it." No. And if she's not happy with the song, then you have to write another one. ... But that song has been magical, because it was her first number one record, which I'm very proud of - the fact that with all her great success, we brought her the first number one record.

*So let's talk a little bit about A Chorus Line, which is huge. You have this extraordinary Broadway production. I saw it on Broadway, probably in its first two months. And then [you found out that the] show was going to film. So, how do you like the fact that your "baby," [which] won a Pulitzer Prize, [is going] from the theater to the movies? Are you excited? Tell me a little bit about that process.*

Well, that film was not a good film, as you probably would agree. And the reason it's not a good film is because it's not... You know, Hitchcock said a great thing about movies. He said, "My movies are made just by the casting. Casting is almost 90% of a movie." Get the right person in the right role, [and] you've got something, you know? That's why he kept going back to certain people all the time. It's true about every other part of the movie. It's true about who you cast to write the music, who you cast as the director. Now, if you say to me that *A Chorus Line* is going to be directed by Bob Fosse or Michael Bennett, I go, "Great film." I can sit down and say, "It's going to be a great film." These people come from the dancing world; they understand it. They got it.

Of course you're excited, because a film is forever. A show, yes, it can run forever or whatever but eventually it's over, and it might play here or it might play there, but it's gone. The great thing about film is, you need a certain film, tomorrow you call it up, you have it in two seconds, right? So in one respect you're very thrilled because it's going to be forever. Number two, to be honest with you, you're very thrilled because you're going to be paid, right? But the problem is that the studio, I think, was so desperate to get their money back because they spent a lot of money to do this film that they went around from one director to another, and everybody turned it down. They either turned it down because they were too concerned about how we were going to do it as well, or it just wasn't their thing. Now, don't get me wrong, I'm not criticizing Mr. [Richard] Attenborough because he did *Ghandi* for God's sake. It's a great film.

*He's Attenborough.*

Right, right, he's Attenborough. But he's the wrong director for that film. Period. And what should have happened was that he should've said "no." I mean, there are certain films that I know that I would have to turn down because I'm the wrong guy for it. So yes, I was excited for it but when I heard who was directing it, instantly I went, "It's over."

*So what was your involvement in the film?*

It was very little because they wanted a couple of different songs, which we wrote. But there was no... I think the biggest difference between a film and a show for a music writer is the following: On a show, you're one of the creators. You're one of the people that actually has input into what the show's going to be. On a film, you're a hired hand. Someone is telling you, "I want this, I want this. We're paying you. You do this." So again, on the totem pole, you've just gone down. So in the film, it was like, this is what they want, this is what they get, goodbye. Nobody was saying to me, "Marvin, we'd really love to know how you feel about this." No.

I'll never forget - Michael Bennett [the director/choreographer of *A Chorus Line* on Broadway], they didn't trust to do the film, but he also made a big mistake, I thought. Because he asked for total control; he asked for final cut. Well, I used to say to him, "Michael, it's your first film. Give me a break. There are film directors out there that have done fifty films and they don't get final cut." So that was a shame, because I think he blew it in that sense.

But he told me his idea for the opening of *A Chorus Line*, the film. Because we were trying to figure [it] out: how can you make the experience the same as in the show? Because in the show, you really feel [like] you're at an audition. You really feel someone is going to win and someone is going to lose. How can you do that in a film? And his idea was to simply [create] a preamble to the film, which was going to be that you were going to see me and Ed Kleban (who wrote the lyrics) and Michael sitting at a table, [in] black and white, saying, "I don't believe this. We have to do the film and we can't use the people who were in the show because they're too old now. So I guess what we're going to do is do this all over again. All right, open the door." (Snaps). Go to color and now, from way up above, you see hundreds of people going around the block to New York City waiting for the audition. Now, interestingly enough, that shot is actually in a film that I think is a great version of our show, which is *Every Little Step* (the documentary). That's a fantastic film. I think that *A Chorus Line*, the film, was blown.

*So let me ask you this then. Do you have a favorite song from A Chorus Line?*

Yes, yes I do, and I'll tell you why I love it. It's called "At The Ballet." And the reason I love it is that this show was being written, so to speak, kind of like two steps forward, one step back. This was not like, there was no script and all of a sudden we're rehearsing fourteen songs, the way you normally do. No, this thing was like, you know, we went into rehearsal with five pages and a possible song. And we would come in with these songs, you know, every couple of weeks we'd come in with a song. And, you know, you'd have the opening and then you'd have "I Can Do That." I like to write in chronological order. But anyway, all of a sudden we did "At The Ballet," and someone said, it was like bringing in the heart and soul of *A Chorus Line*. All of a sudden, the heart, the whatever you call that, that thing was brought to the table, you know? And that changed everything for me on that show. Because I went, "Whoa!" I could see the possibilities once that song was written. And the greatest unsung hero of that show - I mean, Michael

Bennett, no doubt, brilliant - but the unsung hero was Ed Kleban [lyricist of *A Chorus Line*], because Ed Kleban wrote a line in that song that did it for me. When he wrote this line, I went, "We're going somewhere":

"Every prince has got to have his swan."

And that line I went, "Now I know where I'm going with this show." Because, you know, one thing about working on a show is you really don't quite know where you're going with it when you start. You're like, "Where am I?" It's almost like there are many, many ways to get to someplace, you know, [with] your GPS. Well, the GPS picks one way, the GPS is the only one who knows where you're going. I have no idea where I'm going; I'm just following the GPS. Well, the GPS is the director. So I'm following the director; he may know where I'm going, but I don't know where I'm going, and slowly but surely you start to find out. We're all on the same road and you're moving.

*Marvin, have you written for non-fiction at all? Documentaries?*

No.

*Would you like to?*

Well, I think documentaries are wonderful. I love some of the music that they've done. Listen one of the great ones, of course, is when Richard Rodgers did *Victory At Sea*, which was fantastic. Only Richard Rodgers could write that and get a hit song out of it.

*Which was?*

"No Other Love Have I." I mean, give me a break. Richard Rodgers. Unbelievable.

*So in the course of your writing music for a film, at which point do you sit back and decide on what instruments to use? How does that process work?*

So, supposedly, Michaelangelo said when they asked him, "How do you make an elephant?" He said, "I get a slab of concrete. I take away everything that's not an elephant. And I'm left with an elephant." It's the same way. Exactly the same way.

Here's what happens: nowadays you work with DVDs, and in the old days I used to work with a Moviola, you know, a lot of racket. But now it's easy. So the DVD is on. You have a screen at your piano, you know, like a little television. And of course, you always have a tuna fish sandwich. That's so important when you're writing music. You've got to have the tuna fish with the DVD, because otherwise you can't write. So you're writing, and I'll tell you what it is. It's not only trial and error. Because it is; you know, you write something and go, "Nah." And sometimes nothing happens and you go, "Ugh." If it gets to you, you go, "Oh, wait a minute, wait a minute, this is happening for me." Then what normally happens is I either write it out or I record it. And then I let a day go by, because let me tell you something about composers - I think every composer lives with this problem. When you write something, you think, "This is the greatest thing in the entire world. Wow!" Because you've done it. You've done it. It's like, wow! But it

may not stand the test of time. When I say the test of time, I mean one night. One night of sleep. One night to wake up and go, "Do I still love this melody?" It's very much like writing. If you're writing...

*It's also like if you're an editor, or a director. You edit a piece, and if you think that's what's going to the film, you're wrong. You should take that day off and see if it still works.*

Right. One of the reasons that you think it's so great is if like, if it's really late at night and you want to go to sleep you go, "Okay, this is great [snore]." But it may not be great. You might be just thrilled because you've come to the end.

Now, on *The Informant!* - which was really interesting - *The Informant!* wasn't so much about writing a specific melody or whatever. *The Informant!* was about trying to figure out a choice about what type of music I was going to write. What flavor was this going to be? It took me two weeks to figure out this film. And for two weeks, I didn't write a note. For two weeks, my wife said to me, "Marvin the clock is ticking, and you haven't written one note." And I said, "Well, that's not true exactly. I've decided what notes I'm not writing." So I've had two weeks to decide what I'm not writing, but I don't know what...

*So you're eliminating.*

I'm eliminating like crazy. One day I'm walking on the streets of New York and it comes to me. It just hits me and I go, "Okay, this guy's a bipolar guy," the guy who's in the film. And I said, "If he's bipolar, then that means that he sees the world from his eyes, which is totally crazy. Which means that he sees the fact that he's just great and everybody else is nuts." Once I decided upon the premise, that he's wonderful, he's "zippidy-doo-da" and everybody else is crazy, I start to figure out, "Okay, this score is going to be a score made up of vignettes, little things that would come." So, if you see the film, I'm very proud of the fact that the very first cue is what I call my misdirection cue. It's a cue that says, "This is a serious film. It's almost like Bernard Herrmann, you know, and this is very serious." The film starts out with a shot of a tape recorder, you know, a tape recorder with a reel-to-reel. You think, "Oh my God." The next cue is in his head, we meet him for the first time. And I based it on the sound of "Zippidy-doo-da." You know, I do my version of "Zippidy-doo-da." Every one of the cues in the film is my version of something - whether it's Mannix and that whole FBI thing, that whole sound of what Mannix was like - whatever it is, it's all based on vignettes. And that's what I think makes the film totally off the wall and a lot of fun.

*Are there films that you enjoy doing, a certain set of genres that you prefer doing?*

Well, I'll tell you. The two genres that I really love, of course - although every composer really loves if it's a really good film. I mean, I've got to be honest with you, a good film, more people are going to see. I mean, it's just the way it is. Although, you work just as hard on a not-great film as you do on a great film. In fact, sometimes I think you work harder. When you have a good relationship movie, whatever that movie is - whether it's love, or whether it's kids, or whatever - but relationships are what you're looking for, because that's the most human. And when you're writing, that's what you're looking for, that thing that's tying these people together. That's one.

And I love to do comedy, even though comedy, believe it or not, is the hardest thing you could do. I'll tell you why.

*And it is for actors too.*

It's very hard. I'll tell you why it's hard. I learned this from Woody Allen, because I did his first two movies. When you preview a movie, or if sometimes the way Woody does it, he sometimes will show twenty minutes of a movie to people. Just twenty minutes. You can find out where the laughs are if you just do those twenty minutes, right? Now if you have a laugh that people are laughing at, then if you put music to it and somehow or another you lose the laugh, it means you've done something to somehow change the feeling of those people in the theatre. And all of a sudden, you've lost it. Protecting laughs, in a movie, is not easy, and you have to be very smart about it. And sometimes you have to be smart enough to know that you've screwed it up.

For instance, on *Take The Money And Run*, there was this scene, and it was a wonderful scene that Woody Allen did with no dialogue. It's him changing for a date. And the punch line of the scene or the punch of the film is going to be that he changes everything like that and you realize that he's forgot to put his pants on. He did everything perfect except for that. Well, I saw this as a sort of Charlie Chaplin-esque moment and I did this sweet, lovable little waltz like the way Charlie Chaplin would have done. We previewed the film and funny enough, at that point they changed editors. And they got in one of the great editors of all time, Ralph Rosenblum - who's written books about this stuff - and Ralph Rosenblum came to me and said, "Marvin, you're going to need to change that cue." I said, "Why, it's so sweet." He said, "No, it's too sweet. It's got to be funny, it's got to be up. I want, you know, razzmatazz." And I had to change the cue, did the razzmatazz. Next thing you know, we were home. So you have to be very, very careful.

*Speaking of changing cues, how often do you change your music after you've written it? You show it to the director, and I'm not sure of when you show it to him, and you actually have to change something.*

Right, well, I don't show anything until I'm halfway through the film. I like to get through half of it so I have something to show. I will tell you a good story about changing cues. Obviously when you change music, you either like to change it at the piano, which makes it very cheap to change, or while you're at the actual recording session. However, when *The Way We Were* previewed, I forget where we were, but we were like, I can't remember, Phoenix, Denver, somewhere. I was very happy with it because I knew this was my important film and knew this was the one for me. But, I noticed that people didn't quite cry at the end. They *almost* cried, but they didn't quite cry. And I was very upset because I thought, "Hmm, nah, we gotta get these tears! We gotta get Kleenex, you know?" And I spoke with two of the best orchestrators in the world who did it. Their names were Leo Shuken and Jack Hayes. They've done, in their lives, something like four hundred films, I'm not kidding you.

And I learned something, and I think this is particularly important for filmmakers who may end up [being] musicians who want to write for film. They said to me, "You know, Marvin, when you put music behind a film, you might use the theme fifteen times, but the audience may have only heard it three times because they're listening to dialogue. They're not really listening to your music. They might only hear it three times." And the reason he said that to me was because we

had talked about the famous scene at the end where [Barbra Streisand pushes Robert Redford's hair out of his eyes]. And what I had done the first time through was I had put what we call my "second theme" for that. That scene [went] all the way through and then I had switched over into "The Way We Were" and she's singing it at the end. And they said to me, "Marvin, no. Mistake. You've got to go with your theme when she goes like this [pushes hair] then you have to come with 'The Way We Were,'" which would have been, like, the nineteenth time I've used it. But again, they'll have only heard it three times.

So I go to the head of the music department and I say, "I've got to re-record the ending. It's a two minute cue." He said, "Well, we don't have the money for it." I said, "Well, there must be a film on the lot that's doing some big [recording session]. I need sixty musicians and I can just come in and do five minutes..." [He said,] "No!" He was really a mean guy. So I said, "I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to pay for it." And I gave back most of the money that I made on *The Way We Were*. I paid for the session. And to this day, I'm happy about it, because not only is it a great moment still in the film, but now I can sleep. Because I couldn't sleep. Every night that I went to sleep knowing that I didn't put the melody in that spot was like going crazy. That's a true story.

*So did Streisand see both versions?*

Oh, yeah.

*And could she tell the difference right away?*

Yeah. Well, you all could tell the difference right away. I mean, it was like [snap].

*Do you ever look at a movie and say, "I wish I had done that"?*

Oh God, are you kidding me? A thousand of them.

*And I mean, not a movie that's bad and you could have saved it.*

No, no, no, no. Great movies. Oh no, there are just so many great movies out there that you wish that you'd done. I will tell you one movie that I'm glad I didn't do because I would have never done it as great as the guy who did it. That was *Cinema Paradiso*, which was, to me, that's the ultimate home run. No, but there's so many movies... there are some movies actually that I go to see and think to myself, "You know, it's a shame that they didn't have a song in this movie because it's such a beautiful movie. They should have gone past it and had a song or something like that." But the thing is that there are too many movies to mention, of course. I mean, you know, you love certain movies and you wish you had been asked.

*Is there a song or a piece of music that ended up on the editing room floor that you wish they'd put back in?*

No. I mean, there are certain songs that weren't very good that aren't in the movies, but in terms of songs that I've done, there are certain songs to be honest with you that I wish had gotten more notoriety, because I thought they were really good songs. Like, in *Same Time Next*

*Year*, there's a beautiful song: "First Time I Felt Like This I Was Falling In Love." That song, unfortunately, never made it really big and I think it's a beautiful song. There are certain songs I've written that I thought, "That's a good song!"

*Who would you consider your favorite filmmaker? I don't want to say one, but just name a couple. I mean, whose films do you want to write music for?*

Some filmmakers have alliances with certain composers, and they're never going to ask me, which is a shame because I would have loved to have written for Spielberg, I mean, because he's just one of the great [filmmakers]. But there are a lot of them out there that are really good, and I particularly like the new young people. But there's a guy who did the film that I thought was wonderful about Truman Capote [ed note: Bennett Miller, Academy Award-nominated director of *Capote*]. He's a young filmmaker. I'm talking about the one with [Phillip] Seymour Hoffman. Yeah, and that's a young director. There are a lot of new, young directors. Soderburgh, to me, is... I have to tell you something, I haven't done a film for a long time. And when he asked me, I went, "I'm in!" Because he's not just a brilliant filmmaker, he's just a brilliant guy.

*Are there changes in the way that music is being written for movies?*

I think so, and I think that, unfortunately, you've got to be very careful. You know, it used to be, the adage was, if you're not aware of the music, it must be a very good film. That stayed pretty much the way it was for fifty or sixty years. The film that Mike Nichols, another great filmmaker, had done, where they used Simon and Garfunkel, you know, in *The Graduate*. The filmmakers went, and the studios went, "Wait a minute! There's money to be made in these songs and stuff like that." Then, we went into this period when everything had a song. And now we have this period where songs are packaged into films. I mean, you realize, sometimes you're sitting in a movie and all of a sudden the last two minutes of the credits are 114 songs, none of [which] you've actually heard. They all come out of radios during the film. I was like, "You've got to be kidding." And the reason they do that is so they can sell more CDs. I don't like that. That, to me, is ludicrous. I think it's nuts.

The way I like to think of my music, and really good music for films, is you are there to make it fit the film. So when you see a film and it says we are in 1907 Latvia and they say, "And now, here comes Britney Spears singing 'Latvia, I Love You,'" you got to be careful. I still am a purist. I like to hear music that is of the period in the film - unless you're trying to make some wild, interesting notion, to say, "Okay, we're in the period but we're going to do rock and roll." You know what you're doing. But I think that we have to be careful about that, this over-packaging of stuff. And also, to be honest with you, there's a lot of films that come out [for teenagers]; let's face it, the teenage market is humongous. So you're not going to get "great, great, great songs" and great scores out of those films.

You almost have to wait for that famous November, December part [of the film calendar], you know, where those films come out for the Oscars. And all of a sudden, six films come out and you go, "Aha! Here we are. We've all of a sudden gotten to the intellectuals who've all of a sudden arrived." And sometimes, of course, you get a film out of nowhere, thank God... What's great about the public taste is, if they love something, you know, and *Slumdog Millionaire* comes

around and you go, "Yay, team!" So that's the beauty of films. That's the great things about films worldwide. God knows who's going to make a film from some country and, all of a sudden, it just captures the imagination.

The truth of filmmaking - as it is now on Broadway - the story is everything. You see, Broadway changed; it used to be, "boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl." And that's why you have all these standards, by the way. When Gershwin, Cole Porter, and Rodgers were writing, they were writing a show every year. These shows came and went, came and went, came and went. So every year you would have twelve more songs from them. Well, chances are, you're going to get a couple of hits every year. If I write a show every eight years, to get it out there, I'm lucky. They had a turning point, where all of a sudden, the story of a musical became more important than the music. That's why most hit shows, not all of them, but most hit musicals today - barring, say, Andrew Lloyd Webber - usually don't have hit songs at all. You can't really mention a hit song from most musicals, because most musicals, it's not about the music. The music is, at best, serviceable, to get the thing going, and the big dance number and all that. But usually, it's the story, give me the good story. Now, if you're lucky enough to get a great score, thank you, God, you know? But the truth is, the kind of books they wrote in the '40s and '50s, they don't make it anymore. You've got to have a story.

*Well, times have changed. So tell me, since times have changed, how has technology moved or changed the way you do what you do?*

Well, it has made it somewhat easier, although writing for movies is still, I would say, 60% hoping God will be good to you that day and you'll get some inspiration, and 40% mathematics. Because as I say, it's very mathematical. "I need a minute and four seconds. Don't give me a minute-two, no good. Minute-four." So what has changed is that all of that mathematics has become easier. It's easier to figure it out. You now have this wonderful DVD on your piano. It's easier to work. It's very quick to, you know, rewind and go again. I mean you could do things in seconds which, you know, it used to be, every time I would work on a Moviola, you'd have to rewind it. It would take exactly the amount of time it took to see the scene. If the scene took a minute and a half, you have to wait a minute and a half. I mean that doesn't sound like a long time, but it drives you crazy. As opposed to: Zoom! Next! Go!

*Since our audience is filmmakers, what would you tell a brand new filmmaker about the relationship between him and music and a film?*

I think the first thing to do is [if you have a] film that you are passionate about, [make sure that] your film and that story is airtight. Don't start to film anything until you've got a script that you feel is in solid condition - and that you're passionate about, that you would die for it. It's not worth doing if you wouldn't die for it. If you wouldn't actually bleed for it - see blood on the floor - don't do it. That's number one. Number two: music [is] a great ally. It's an ally. It can be very helpful. And you don't have to immediately think about it, particularly when you start. But slowly, surely, as the film is progressing, as you're starting to edit, as you whatever, you're going to start thinking about it, and you're going to start going to libraries and coming up with certain music that you really like for the temporary track. At that point, you want to find a composer, if you're going to get a composer, you want to find a composer who is open to your suggestions, but hopefully has his own suggestions at the same time. In the same way that you

work with actors and actresses, give that composer a little bit of your own time to sit down and talk about what your vision is. Then give him some time to breathe because remember - he's new on the project. Then, a couple of weeks later, get together and see what he's written. Then you'll know what you've got.

*Perfect. What did I forget to ask you? What should someone out there know about Marvin Hamlisch?*

They should just know that I always consider it a privilege to write for a film or a movie. I don't take it for granted. I always think about it as a baseball player who comes up to the bat, you know what I mean? It's a big deal. Are you going to get a chance to hit a home run, or will you blow it and strike out? So it's always, for me, a challenge to write. But on the other hand, it's always a joy when it comes out looking good. I mean, I'm most proud of, of course, *The Way We Were*, *The Swimmer* because it was my first, *The Sting*, because, you know, it was so great to work with George Roy Hill, a great director. These are strong directors, these are people who knew what they wanted. I think *Sophie's Choice* was one of my best that I've ever done. And I look back on them and I go, "That's okay. I'm happy with that." There are certain movies that I hope you never see. I'll never forget one that's the worst movie I ever worked on, called *Move*. I don't think you can even buy it, thank God. I think they may have burned the negative. But that's about it.

*Thank you very much.*

Pleasure.